

New Atheism

Is it only my imagination, or is atheism enjoying a resurgence in our society?

Forrest L. Bivens

It's not your imagination. Within the last decade so-called New Atheism has aggressively ridiculed Christianity and other religions. Now we find a "new" New Atheism that is "friendlier" but nevertheless consciously irreligious. These combined movements have been described as a godless tsunami sweeping over Europe and North America.

NEW ATHEISM

Uncompromising critics of religion like Richard Dawkins, Victor Stenger, and Christopher Hitchens have authored best-selling books. These New Atheists usually offer a "scientific" perspective which concludes that all we see isn't designed by God or any supernatural being. They repeat atheistic arguments that are ancient but repackage them for their modern audience, release them through major publishers, and reveal them to millions who would otherwise never pick up an atheist book. The most prominent feature of New Atheism is not what it says but the harsh and often shrill language it uses. It is significantly less tolerant of religion than earlier atheism. In a Nov. 8, 2006, article, Simon Hooper for CNN states, "What the New Atheists share is a belief that religion should not simply be tolerated but should be countered, criticized and exposed by rational argument wherever its influence arises." New Atheism declares that religion is poison to be flushed away and sees religious people as idiots to be educated if possible or suppressed if unwilling to be taught the wisdom of atheism.

NEW NEW ATHEISM

A new generation of notable atheists has emerged. Some of them are women ("pink atheists"). Most of them are friendly in tone and effectively use humor in their arguments. The goal of these new New Atheists is not a world without religion but a world in which the religious and irreligious coexist peaceably and atheists are respected and heartily appreciated. Their strategy is parallel to the successful gay rights movement that, instead of seeking to make everyone gay, seeks to secure equal rights for homosexuals and lesbians largely by trumpeting what peaceable, ethical, and decent citizens and neighbors they are. This new wave of atheists emphasizes its own "natural goodness" and that of its children and claims to be morally responsible without believing in God or everlasting punishment. These atheists lament how some children of religious households aren't allowed to play with their children and hope for a country where children can play together without regard for any beliefs. They view

religious people more as deluded victims of religious manipulators and hope to win them to unbelief through conversations that do not degenerate into arguments.

RENEWED OPPORTUNITIES

The resurgence of atheism and secular humanism around us may be viewed as a renewed opportunity for us to serve the irreligious in their greatest need. They need a right relationship with the God they deny exists. We know the key to this treasure. We can courteously yet firmly speak of ultimately undeniable evidences of his power and nature (Romans 1:20). We can especially remind them that all claims to be really good or moral are largely empty assertions, as our consciences testify (Romans 2:15, 3:23).

And most of all, we can repeatedly share the good news of our Savior, who perfectly and completely removes our guilt and gives a right relationship with God that endures forever (Romans 3:24, 6:23). Rational arguments for God's existence might play a role in our interaction with atheists, but sharing law as law and gospel as gospel always deserves center stage.

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